

## THE BEATITUDES

The Poor In Spirit (Matt. 5:3)

Scripture Luke 5:1-11

INTRO: In our last message we gave a general introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, including in that, an introduction to the beatitudes. The beatitudes are the section that open this great sermon. We paid special attention to the word 'blessed' because it plays a big part in the first 12 verses, occurring 9 times. I expressed the view that it does not mean 'happy', but rather it means something like, 'to be envied' or as has been suggested, 'to be congratulated'. The person whose character is like these beatitudes describe, is the man who is to be envied, not from a secular point of view; but from the spiritual and divine point of view. Here is the fulfilled man. He is the blessed man, no matter what circumstances in life he finds himself in.

But, this blessed man may not at all feel blessed. To be poor in spirit; to mourn; to be meek; to be hungry and thirsty and so on, may not feel blessed. Most certainly many persecuted people do not feel blessed at all. But, from a spiritual or divine perspective; they have the life. They are the blessed.

Furthermore, we said that nobody, by nature, has the characteristics described in these beatitudes. Romans 8:8 says, "They that are in the flesh", that is the non Christian, "cannot please God." He is incapable of pleasing God. He may give to the poor, and feel good about it, but he cannot please God. When we are born again, God begins to conform us to the image of His Son, and it is there that we begin to take on these characteristics.

Furthermore, we said that these beatitudes are not precepts to be followed. We are not instructed to become poor in spirit. One cannot decide to become poor in spirit and generate such a characteristic. These beatitudes describe what kind of characteristics are generated by being a true

Christian. If one lives the true Christian life, one will become what these beatitudes describe.

And again, we said that these beatitudes do not all show up in the Christian life at once. No doubt, without the first one, one does not even enter the picture. But from there on there is to be spiritual growth, from grace to grace as we become conformed to the image of Christ.

Then let me mention yet, as well, that these beatitudes are totally un-worldly. They by no means fit what this present world would call blessed. To the world, these beatitudes are the things you would want to stay away from. Imagine, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Or Blessed are those that mourn." What would the world have to say about that? Try to find that on bill boards or advertisements. No, these beatitudes are totally un-worldly.

## I. BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

### A. The Character Of The Poor In Spirit

Well, with those introductions, we are ready to look at the first of these beatitudes. Jesus had gone up into the mountain, that is a mountain in La Crete terms of mountains. By British Columbian standards, it was a hill. And when He had found a nice spot, He sat down and His disciples came to Him. Let me describe the spot if it was anywhere close to where the present place that commemorates this where this sermon took place. It is a place that overlooks the Sea of Galilee. And as He sat there, it says, "He opened His mouth and taught them." And the very first thing He said was, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

It is our first task to answer this question: What does it mean to be poor in spirit? Is being poor in spirit the same as humility? I think there may be some difference. I think it may be that, becoming poor in spirit, is a forerunner of humility. It happens before I become humble. When I am humble, I have learned what I am in reality, and I have

accepted my place under the mighty hand of God. To be poor in spirit is to be emptied of my own ambition, zeal, view of myself and any goodness I may think I have.

Let me use an illustration I used at a men's meeting some time ago. Let us say I am good at backyard horseshoe games. I can win about everybody I play with. Another neighbor comes and he is quite good and I am a bit apprehensive, but we play and I win. I am still quite full of myself. And then another neighbor moves in and he is also a horseshoe game player. And then there is a fall fair and I have entered to play in the horseshoe games. And I am winning, and winning, and then, along comes this new neighbor. We start off but very soon I realize I have met my match. Then a little later I learn I have met more than my match. And he wins me, 21 to 9. And I am deflated. All the spirit I have with regard to horseshoe games is gone with the wind. Suddenly I have lost my interest in playing. I have become poor in spirit regarding horse shoe game playing. Do you understand what I am talking about?

Let me illustrate this from the OT. There is a story in 1 Kings 10 that illustrates this matter of becoming poor in spirit. Let us go there (read 10:1-3). Now you see, horseshoe players compare themselves with other horseshoe players; not with, say hockey players or baseball players. And kings and queens compare themselves with other kings and queens, not with ambassadors or such like. And the queen of Sheba has heard about Solomon, and from all she has heard, he may be greater in kingdom than she is. And she finally gets up the nerve to go check him out. And so, to impress him with who she is, she comes laden with gifts. And as she conversed with him she found he was a truly wise man, and she opened her heart to him and he answered her questions as though they were elementary.

Now look at verses 4-5 (read). When she had heard him and seen his majesty, she knew he was far superior to her, as far as royalty is concerned, and she became poor in spirit. So poor in fact, that there was no spirit left in her. She is deflated. She has met one of her own kind who was far superior to herself, and she could no longer think herself as, 'your majesty'. She had met, 'his majesty'.

The queen of Sheba had heard a lot about Solomon and his kingdom. And she was a queen. She knew royal treatment. Everyone she met bowed to her. She knew what it was like to be above other people in public stature. She likely seldom met her equal. Her sphere of expertise, of course, was royalty. But when she had tested Solomon with hard questions, and he had answered her as though she was a beginner, and when she had seen the food they ate, the sitting of his servants, the attendance of his ministers and how they were dressed; his cupbearers, and also their clothing, and the steps by which he went up to the house of the Lord; there was no more spirit in her. She had become poor in spirit regarding royalty. She was used to being on top. But in royalty, in comparison to Solomon, she now felt herself a long way from the top. She had been brought down low. Solomon was the provider and she was the seeker. And all the spirit went out of her.

Now I recommend to you that when Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit", He is talking about being truly godly and righteous and sinless. He was talking about what we call being conformed to the image of Christ. He was the Christ. You see, there is a sphere with regard to others in which we think of ourselves as their superior, or at the very least their equal. I am talking about the area of righteousness or goodness or integrity. When we compare ourselves to others; most of us find ourselves somewhat superior to others or at least their equal. Talk to those who are not saved. Ask them if they think they are going to heaven. Many will say they think they are. And

then ask them why they think they are going there and immediately, in their mind, they will find people who are much worse than they are, or they will think of religious people, and find themselves just as good or even better than so called religious people. They immediately compare themselves with others. So, when people compare themselves with others with regard to holiness or righteousness or goodness, they think they will go to heaven.

But, when we truly meets the Lord Jesus Christ, and He points out sin in our lives, and the conviction of the Holy Spirit sets in, of a sudden we find ourselves in trouble, as far as righteousness and holiness are concerned. In a moment we see ourselves farther removed from being like Christ, than the Queen of Sheba saw herself before Solomon. How many of you have been in the presence of a person you think is very spiritual? How do you feel in their presence? But then you meet Jesus Christ in experience and for a moment you get to see yourself and what you are really like. And what you thought was quite something in yourself, you find is like filthy rags. Every point of goodness in your life, you now begin to see in reality in comparison to Jesus Christ, and in comparison to real character and real godliness. And you hit rock bottom. When it comes to character, in comparison to Jesus Christ and God's requirements, you now see yourself for what you really are and it is enough to make you want to vomit. And you say, "O wretched man that I am. Who shall deliver me from this body of death? Oh God, I am nothing. Oh God, I am worse than nothing. Oh God, have mercy on me the sinner." When we come to such a point, now we have become poor in spirit. There is no more spirit left in us with regard to righteousness. We have hit a low of lows. And now, praise God, finally, at long last, we have entered the sphere of the blessed.

Let me show you this in the NT. Look at a very religious man in Luke 18 (read 9-12). THE SINNER? I

suppose most religious men class themselves as at least somewhat better than most others. And those who are not religious feel they are at least not worse than others. And this Pharisee viewed himself as considerably better than men like this tax collector. And as he is praying, along comes this tax collector. Look at him in verses 13-14 (read). This tax collector had come to see himself for who he really was and it grieved him to his heart. He would have possibly wished if he could only be as righteous as this Pharisee who could pray with his chin in the air. But the tax collector had become poor in spirit. But he went home justified. Why? Something had happened to his character. He did not seek to become poor in spirit. He saw his deplorable state and sought to get right with God. And in so doing, he became poor in spirit.

Let me show you this man again in another passage. Go to Luke 5 (read 1-8). Peter, in a brief moment, saw the vast difference between himself and Jesus Christ. And what was it in Jesus that so set Him apart? It was Peter's recognition of his own sin. Oh, how blind we are to our own sin. I can speak of myself. Sometimes I feel I have attained to some measure of sanctification only to find another area that is not right.

And this state, this emptied state that Peter found in the boat, Jesus says, is the blessed state. The man that is poor in spirit is the blessed man. But the man in this blessed state would most likely cry out, "There is nothing blessed about this state. Oh miserable man that I am." But right here, this text becomes the text of man's need. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Here is the entrance to the kingdom of God. Oh, no, this blessed state does not feel blessed. It feels anything but blessed. You must now be told the facts about your case, otherwise you will never believe it. This is the blessed state. No man that does not reach this state can enter the kingdom of God.

This first beatitude is the first because you cannot put any of the other beatitudes in its place. There is no entrance into the kingdom of God without becoming poor in spirit. So we can rightly say that there is no one in the kingdom of God who did not at some point in life become spiritually poor. We cannot enter the kingdom without it. When we truly become Christians, we must have first become spiritually poor. Think of it, when we get saved, can we get saved while we are filled with pride or filled with ourselves? No! We must be humbled before we ever repent of our sins and we must come to admit that we are not capable of life and that we need the Lord. Now, we may have a long way to go after we come to that, but we cannot enter the kingdom of God without it. You see, it says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Lloyd Jones says this beatitude speaks of an emptying first. There must be conviction before there is conversion. He also says the Gospel condemns before it releases. You see, before we can get saved we must become poor in spirit.

Now this beatitude is not a prescription of how to get saved. We cannot say, "I will become poor in spirit and then I will be saved." That is the error of the Catholic monks. They were going to get saved by imitating Christ. We do not get saved by imitating Christ. We ought to imitate Christ because we are saved. So this beatitude is not a prescription of how to get saved. It is a description of what has to happen inside of those who are ready to get saved. It is when we come to realize how sinful we are, how far from like Christ we are, and we humble ourselves and confess our sins, and hand the reins of our life over to Christ, that we get saved. Many imitators of Christ still have the reins in their own hands and they are still lost, very lost.

Being poor in spirit is not something you attain to by trying to be poor in spirit. This is not a precept. This is the first description of the

character of anyone who enters the kingdom of God. It is something you become because something else has already happened. In this state we have come to see ourselves in life for what you really are. A miserable wretch. A lost soul. We see ourselves as someone in the clutches of Satan and bound for hell. We see ourselves as most miserable. And as D Martin Lloyd Jones says we cannot attain to the character of these beatitudes by monasticism, or by scarifying the flesh.

The world values or considers the man blessed who has self reliance, self confidence and self expression (DMLJ). Go to, say a high school graduation service. What are grads told? Blessed are the poor in spirit? No! They are told, "You can become what you want to be. You have been equipped, now go be the real you. You are somebody." Those who put themselves forward and are self assured, with a high self esteem are considered blessed. But the poor in spirit are anything but like this. Look at the political world. I spoke to one man who was in politics for years as a Christian. And he later said, "I got so tired of having to promote myself."

But these beatitudes run as contrary to the life of the fleshly Christian, as they do to the world. The Apostle Paul says, "We preach not ourselves." Paul did not use enticing words of man's wisdom. Fleshly preachers do that. Paul said some preach Christ even from envy and strife (Phil. 1:15). Of Paul's preaching others said, "His appearance is weak and his speech contemptible." Then consider Philippians 3:4-11 (read). In these verses are the things that the religious world values. But that which the flesh or the religious world values Paul counts but dung, manure.

Now let me remind us here whom we are talking about in this beatitude. We are talking about the blessed man. This is not necessarily the happy man. He is the blessed man. He is in a state that if we could really



see what it is worth to be in this state, people would say, "Oh, I wish I could come to that." I think this is the state where God says, "That's the man." But the man in this state may say, "Oh, I do not feel like I am the man. You should see what I've seen in myself. I am sick of myself. I am so selfish." That is the blessed man. Before we can grow spiritually and move forward, we must first come to this state. That is what is blessed about this man.

Now I want you to note also that our text does not say, "Blessed are the poor." This beatitude does not speak about being poor in purse or poor in possessions. We do not have a picture here of men like Francis of Assisi. Then, second, it does not say, "Blessed are the spiritually poor." The unsaved are not spiritually poor, they are spiritually bankrupt. But a Christian may be spiritually poor because he does not seek first the kingdom of God. That is not a blessed state. It says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." It is a matter of the spirit.

Now, I think there most certainly is a relationship between being poor in spirit and humility. The 'Fourfold Gospel Commentary' says, "The poor in spirit are those who feel a deep sense of spiritual destitution and comprehend their nothingness before God. The kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit, because they seek it, and therefore find it and abide in it. To this virtue of being poor in spirit is opposed the pride of the Pharisee, which caused him to thank God that he was not as other men. And this prideful attitude caused him to fail of the kingdom of heaven. There must be emptiness before there can be fullness, and so poverty of spirit precedes riches and grace in the kingdom of God" end quote (The Fourfold Gospel Comm.)

Consider Isaiah 57:15. It says, "For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of

the contrite ones." No wonder the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit. God dwells in such persons. It is here where He is at home. He is not at home in the heart of the proud. We would do well to ask ourselves, does God find a dwelling place in me?

Then consider Isaiah 66:1-2, "Thus says the LORD: 'Heaven *is* My throne, And earth *is* My footstool. Where *is* the house that you will build Me? And where *is* the place of My rest? For all those *things* My hand has made, And all those *things* exist,' says the LORD. 'But on this *one* will I look: On *him who is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.'" The person God takes note of, the one in whom He can rest, is the one who is of a contrite spirit. That is the kind of person God is looking for.

There are some homes where you immediately feel at home. There is something about a place like that that is comfortable for you. You feel right at home. And there are such people where God feels at home. It is not with the rich or the mighty, but with him who is poor, poor in spirit and of a contrite heart. There He feels at home. There is another place where He feels at home. It is in the man who trembles at His word. When you read the Word of God and you tremble before God and you want to please Him above all else, and you fear to do wrong, in such a heart God feels at home. No wonder it says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Now let me tell you when it is we become poor in spirit. It is when we come into contact with Jesus Christ. It is when we get to see Him for who He is, which then causes us to see ourselves for who we are. We saw earlier that there came such a time for the man who became the Apostle Peter. He was a fisherman. When he recognized Jesus Christ, he recognized himself for what he was; a sinner. And he was trapped in a boat with a holy man and he had no place to run. So he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." When we see Jesus in reality, it will cause us to either reject Him and rebel, or recognize who we are and become poor in spirit. D. Martin Lloyd Jones says that being poor in spirit is the complete absence of pride. Maybe I would say being poor in

spirit is the beginning prerequisite to the absence of pride. Pride is a long battle.

And so let me mention an important point here. Being poor in spirit is not a one time event. We do not only enter the kingdom poor in spirit. In our Christian walk, in the process of sanctification we will have to come to find how deceitful and dark our heart is. And as we grow spiritually, we will have to become poor in spirit again and again. So, not only is becoming poor in spirit important to entrance into the kingdom of heaven; it is important to the whole of the Christian life, the whole process of sanctification.

Let me mention here as well, that I agree with Jones when he says that no man is naturally like this. It is not in the natural man to be poor in spirit. There are all kinds of substitutes for it, but the real thing is found only in the Christian. The flesh profits nothing. Jesus said in John 6:63 that the flesh profits nothing. It is the spirit that gives life. It is possible to enter the kingdom poor in spirit and become puffed up with pride in a very short time. If so, we will have to become poor in spirit again.

So our text says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. I have mentioned that the idea behind the word blessed, I think, is, 'to be envied is such a person.' The person who is poor in spirit probably in no wise feels like his is a blessed state. But it is God who determines who is in the blessed state.

#### B. The Possession Of The Poor In Spirit

Now, we have yet to consider the meaning of the statement, "...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Here we are given the possessions of the poor in spirit. Theirs, is the kingdom of heaven. It belongs to them. Let me just mention, without taking much time on it, that there are those who find a difference between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. I do not think there is a difference.

But let us now ask, what exactly is the kingdom of God or of heaven? In my Catechism notes I say, "The

term *kingdom* can refer to the area over which a monarch reigns, the people over whom a monarch reigns, or the actual reign itself." The kingdom of heaven, as I see it, is the kingdom ruled from heaven. The kingdom ruled from heaven, I further see as referring to the people over whom God rules from heaven. I am not talking about the people over whom God is sovereign. He is sovereign over all people. But there is a particular people over whom He rules. That means, these people do what He instructs them to do. And the people over whom He rules are those who have repented of their sins and who believe in Him. At the time the beatitudes were written, these people were basically found among the Jews. They are the ones that had the Word of God. But even most religious Jews were not actually part of God's kingdom in the sense as those people over whom God actually ruled by personal salvation.

When the Church was born in Acts 2, all those over whom God ruled were all those who dealt with their sins and believed in Jesus Christ as their Messiah. As there were many in Israel who were not truly saved, so today there are many professing believers in the Church, but they are not truly saved. God does not rule over those who are not saved. He is sovereign over them but He does not rule over them in the sense that they are subject to His word. Jesus said, "Why do you call Me, Lord, Lord, and do not do the things I say?"

But those who are poor in spirit have entered that people over whom God truly rules. They are the saved. If they die, they go to heaven to be with the Lord. While they live, they live for Him. Colossians 1:13 says that God has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. As I see it, the kingdom of heaven today, refers to those who are saved and over whom the King of heaven rules.

Romans 14 deals with the problem of diets and days. What is permissible to be eaten and what is not? And in verse 17 Paul says, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink..." The issues of the kingdom the poor in spirit belong to does not have to do with diets and days. What does it have to do with? Paul says,

"For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." When we come to the fourth beatitude, it will say, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness..." In this sermon, in Matthew 6:33 Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness..." And in 5:20 He said that unless the believer's righteousness would exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees, they would not enter the kingdom of God.

Now this kingdom, the kingdom of God, begins the moment we truly get saved. The kingdom is ours. But when Jesus Christ returns to earth at the end of the tribulation He will set up His visible, literal kingdom, and He will rule from heaven. Look at what Jesus said in Matthew 19:28 (read). Then look at Revelation 20:6 (read). This includes all believers of the first resurrection, which includes the true Christians of the Church age. Yes, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

CONCL: So, in conclusion, we have looked at Jesus first beatitude as given in Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." We considered what it means to be poor in spirit. I have no doubt it speaks of those who see their real state in light of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. I mentioned earlier that those who are in the flesh, the unsaved, cannot please God. They must come to see themselves in light of who Jesus Christ is. They must come to see their exceeding sinfulness. As long as they compare themselves with other people, they will always find worse, but when they come into the presence of Jesus Christ, as Peter did long ago in that boat with Jesus, they will think they are OK.

But, not only must the lost sinner come by way of the narrow door; the door of the poor in spirit, but the Christian must come to see himself in light of Christ again and again as he matures spiritually. Pride wants to easily set in on a Christian, and then once more he must be brought to this place of being poor in spirit.

Then we saw the reason the poor in spirit are in a state that is to be envied. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven! The

kingdom belongs to them. It is theirs. That is most wonderful news. It is theirs right now. The verb is in the present tense. But if we would study the NT further, we would find that in the future, the believer of this age will be a co ruler with Christ in that kingdom He will set up on earth. Oh what a tremendous door to life is given to the poor in spirit!